

**Proposal for *Phenomenology of Perception* Around the World:
A 75th Anniversary Broadcast Series**

Working title of the video:

“A Bad Taste in Good Faith: An Auto-Ethnography During the Pandemic”

Name of author:

Minglei Zhang (Hart Bullock), Communications (M.A.) and Minor in Philosophy,
School of Humanities, The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg.

Abstract/Plan for the broadcast:

A 20-25-minute video essay (English) in a storytelling manner presents the case how Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* delivered a novel sense and comfort to me and encouraged me to grasp the essence of my feelings after I tested positive for COVID-19 and lost my sense of taste and smell in early May this year. From an auto-ethnographic perspective, I will focus on illustrating the *earthly bodies* and *earthly delights* in a time of crisis and exploring how phenomenology can ease the distress of this particular epidemic. These narratives will include what struggles I experienced in terms of sensation and how I retrieved the sense of being grounded. Autoethnography as an approach will help me to describe and systematically analyze my personal encounters to understand the structure of my lived experience. This approach often challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act. A researcher normally uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, autoethnography is both process and product.

Some of my working paragraphs:

I. A Bit of Taste Wanted

Knowing our body is one thing; learning to accept it is another.

The second day after I learned one of my roommates tested positive for an epidemic viral pneumonia, my loss of taste and smell started. Using and living with my tongue for nearly 26 years, I have never had this experience of *not* feeling it being with me at all. Not until my symptoms threw my mind back to where I had good knowledge of what things tasted like and how the world

smelled, did I realize this consequential change to my body. This change that happened to my tongue immediately caused a crisis to my whole body. When the content of taste is gone, all the textures surrounding the hollowness become ridiculously useless. Without the sense of heat, the sun looks no different than a meteorite. Since I cannot taste food or smell blooming flowers, my sense of disconnection from my body and this world engulfs my presence. I feel ungrounded like a blown off kite, stringless and detached.

As a person who used to be sensitive to all the tastes and smells, living in a body which does not have these functions seems like being imprisoned in a place where no exit exists. There is no freedom for me while confronted with the same body structure that used to empower me. The first meal I had after I lost my taste was a dish mixed with beef and broccoli. Chewing those carefully cooked ingredients now became an evil tryout. Each bite spoke to my incompetence directly and tortured my limited tolerance by its humiliation. My taste dumped me, and I had no chance to do any begging but could only wait for its return. The missing piece of my lived body experience calls for its inquiry of pursuing completeness. Merleau-Ponty uses the term “body schema” to describe the “situational spatiality” of things in contrast with their “positional spatiality.” He argues that our body has a “situational spatiality” that is oriented toward actual or possible tasks (102). Thus, the meaning of our body depends on how it is perceived from our experiences. In other words, the concept of bodily experience is always half-done at present and its meaning remains to be accomplished in the future.

II. The Taste of Pain

If the taste of food is mainly the tongue’s job, the taste of pain is the whole body’s business. “There is a necessary pain to a full life. The unavoidable pains that we encounter in our impersonal relationships, in our engagement with the world, and even within our flesh come as a direct result being dynamically part of interaction” (Mazis 223). Life without any pain is incomplete because recognizing the intimacy between our body and the world is not an easy process. Children learn how to walk on the earth usually through their painful lessons. Accepting the fact that my taste is gone is painful. By coping with this kind of pain, I suddenly lost a great deal of my appetite. At the same time, my body seemingly detected my thoughts and I started to feel less hungry than I

used to be. As a person who likes cooking and tasting a diverse set of cuisines, entering the kitchen now becomes a difficult task for me. The same space has a new meaning to me.

This new reality shredded my well-established body rhythm, and I have no idea where I should start to recollect these pieces. *Or should I?* I have always treasured my sense of taste and been proud of it for it carries my memories and maintains my emotional equilibrium. Lacking the touch of taste upon my tongue is comparable to crying without tears.

III. A Call to Faith

“Belief is not a mere cognitive function. Belief is an assent” (Mazis 212).

The realization of my situation is significant in helping me determining my well-beingness in my lived experience. Although the loss of taste is a fact, using what gestures to deal with it is one of my privileges. Gestures speak for attitudes. “Calling into question what my presence to myself teaches me would result in the loss of the foundations of all my certainties” (Merleau-Ponty 458). Although the tradition of phenomenology calls for attention to “go back to things themselves,” most continental philosophers’ efforts indicate starting from things. When phenomenologists fill the gap where the ignorance of things themselves prevails, they demonstrate the significance of paying close attention to our body, experience and relationships among things in our daily life. However, the encounter with my loss of taste helps me realize that there is another dimension called “beyond things themselves” in my consciousness that drives our sense of survival despite all the phenomena — it is called *faith*.

Works Cited

Mazis, Glen A. *Earthbodies: Rediscovering Our Planetary Senses*. SUNY Press, 2012.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012.

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